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MANY DENUNCIATIONS

Founder-Member Traces Student Assn.'s History

By Robert H. Sollen
News-Press Staff Writer

The National Student Assn. didn't start out that way.

The association that subsequently accepted large CIA grants was organized at a national conference on the University of Wisconsin campus in the summer of 1947 as an independent-minded group.

It was a time when serious-minded veterans dominated the campuses and it was early in the cold war. It was also, coincidentally, the same year the CIA was established.

At the outset, NSA was denounced as too liberal or even radical by those who opposed its stand on civil rights, student rights and strong student government. In retrospect, these 1947 positions are not radical, but it seemed that way to some at that time.

DENOUNCED BY LEFT

And it was denounced by far left groups for organizing in a manner not conducive to strong far left representation and for not affiliating with the International Union of Students.

Far left groups—Communist, Communist front, pro-Communist or those widely believed to be in one of these categories—wanted NSA to constitute at least in part special interest campus organizations—largely, no doubt, political groups.

The founding convention decided, however, that each member campus would be represented by its student government, not by other student groups through which the far left felt it would have a greater voice.

QUESTION RAISED

As the organization began operations that autumn in its

(Editor's note: Robert H. Sollen, a News-Press staff writer, was a member of the University of Wisconsin Student Board that was host to the founding convention of the National Student Assn. in 1947. He was also NSA's first public relations director and editor of its monthly NSA News in 1947-48.)

Madison, Wis., headquarters, the question of whether to affiliate with the International Union of Students (IUS) became increasingly controversial. Many felt that the IUS was not an independent world student movement, but a Soviet-dominated association. NSA had observers at IUS's Prague headquarters.

The issue was resolved rather soon by the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February, 1948. The IUS either condoned or failed to condemn the coup and appeared to become even more clearly an instrument of the Soviet bloc. NSA set aside any consideration of affiliation for the immediate future.

It was to counter the propaganda activities of the IUS that the CIA later helped finance NSA activities abroad.

OWN PROGRAM

Before this, however, NSA had set up its own extensive "work and study abroad" program for American students, despite its relatively meager funds.

At the beginning, at least, NSA made efforts not only to keep from being used as an instrument of Soviet policy, but of American policy as well. It was willing to co-operate with

the U.S. government in areas of mutual agreement and concern, but this was done openly through contacts, for instance, with the office of the U.S. commissioner of education.

A vice president during NSA's first year was Ralph Dungan, later to become a White House aide to President Kennedy. In July, 1965, Dungan, as ambassador to Chile, learned that the Pentagon was, without the knowledge of the embassy or the State Department, instituting a research project in Chile on the "social problems of insurgency" and how to influence social and political change abroad.

This, Dungan concluded immediately, was none of the Pentagon's business, and if such a U.S. study were to be made in Chile it would be the State Department's task. Dungan wanted no Pentagon activity in Chile that sounded like political manipulation by the U.S. military.

He protested to Washington and the White House not only stopped the Chilean project, but similar programs elsewhere that were brought to light as a result of Dungan's protest.

It is unlikely that the initial NSA officers—such as Dungan or NSA President Bill Welsh of Berea (Ky.) College—would have received CIA approaches cordially.